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METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR CREATING ADVERTISEMENT BOOKS

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention.

This invention relates generally to advertisement books, and more particularly, to computerized/automated preparation, production, publishing and management of ad-books and related print publishing frequently used by charities for fund raising.

2. Related Art.

Advertisement books (used herein as "ad-books") are fundraising vehicles whereby members and supporters of an organization pay the organization to place an advertisement (used herein as "ad") or message in an organization's publication for the dual purpose of advertising and contributing to the group. Organizations that may use ad-books include charities, schools, teams, associations, clubs, professional organizations, lodges, unions, boards, fraternities, sisterhoods, causes, hospitals, homes, condo-boards, synagogues, events, community groups, and political party candidates. Typically, an organization will solicit members and supporters to buy an ad in their ad-book and either sell or give away the ad-books as a fundraising tool. As a fundraising tool, ad-books (and related publications) are similar to group fundraisers such as award dinners, car washes, bake-sales, raffles, auctions, golf-outings, or similar events. Each such event offers members and supporters an excuse or opportunity to contribute and help the organization raise money. Further, ad-books are often produced along with or in the form of dinner-programs, group directories, group calendars, raffles, yearbooks, newsletter, or along with other simple content or events.

Although ad-book ads are viewed by advertisers as a deductible business expense, the "advertiser's" primary economic motivation is to make a contribution to the organization as opposed to receiving quality or value for a purchase. In this sense,

this type of ad is based on the advertiser's desire to support the organization (or be seen among his/her peers as supporting). Often ad-books are a part of the social fabric of the charitable community and allow donors to be recognized for their contributions. For example, a large and generous donor may be recognized in a prominent full-page, gold-leaf ad, while smaller donors may be acknowledged in smaller ads. Thus, the ad-book may be seen as a roll of givers that acts as a directory, establishes a pecking-order, and may even pressure others to donate. In this sense, ad-books give the advertiser the opportunity to be known as a benefactor.

. The process of putting together an ad-book includes gathering advertisers, creating ads, collating ads, collecting money, issuing receipts, performing layout of content and graphics, and printing and distributing ad-books. Organizations that use ad-books as a fundraising vehicle usually perform these tasks by organizing committees of volunteers. Many of these tasks may be performed by the organization or sent to local businesses to assist with the production of the ad-books. In either case, the process is quite time consuming and very labor intensive for the organizations that use ad-books as a fundraising vehicle. Further, since organizations generally do not collaborate or co-fundraise, the economic benefit that arises from producing ad-books in large quantities for many different organizations is unavailable. Thus, a number of alternative fundraising ways are known and preferred to using ad-books.

In the field of pure charity, we know of at least one known reference describes a method of and device for streamlining, simplifying and inducing the giving of contribution or gift commitments by contributors or prospective gift givers that involves dispersing through a crowd of prospective contributors or gift givers a plurality of keyless, electronic contributions or gifts management devices for immediate entry of consecutive data comprising the identities of the contributors or gift givers making the monetary contribution commitments or monetary gift commitments.

Another known "charity" reference describes a method of capturing monetary donations or monetary gifts made by donors or gift givers at points in time and space in which said donors or gift givers are optimally motivated to make said donations or gifts, said donations or gifts being the donation or gift preferences of respective donors or gift givers. The method comprises inputting a multiplicity of sequences of data comprised of monetary donations or monetary gifts. The monetary donations or monetary gifts are

made by a plurality of said respective donors or gift givers consecutively free of input of information unrelated to said respective monetary donations or monetary gifts at a multiplicity of distinct sites where said donations and gifts are being received.

Another known "non-ad" reference describes a central office that correlates charitable contributions made at vending stations in food service establishments which issue information carriers in return for charitable contributions which are receipts for the contribution and entitle the donor to a beverage dispensed from a machine responding to the information carrier. Yet another known reference describes a multiplicity of charitable collection stations with selectors for choosing the charity to which a contribution is destined, a change maker for issuing change if desired, a display for displaying information with respect to premiums available and contributions made, and a modem or other telecommunicator for two-way communications with a central station.

However, none of these known ways streamlines the creation, publishing, and development of ads, ad-books or related print-jobs. Accordingly, a new method and system for creating ad-books is needed.

SUMMARY

A method and apparatus are provided for preparing ad-books over a communications network. The method includes preparing an advertisement at a user terminal connected to the communications network. The method further includes processing the advertisement at a server connected to the communications network for placing the advertisement in an ad-book.

Many features and benefits are reasonably expected from this invention, e.g. automated renewal notices, multi-year ad placement, standardized content management, standardized ad-book features such as covers, sizes, table of contents, affinity group content, and celebrity endorsement; consolidated printing and print work bidding, consolidated advertising and account management, cross-ad-book advertising and demographic specific publication, automated up-selling techniques, on-line publishing and directory services, lock-box collection, services and specialized accounting, reporting and receipts, which are typical of not-for-profit and political organizations.

Other embodiments, features, and advantages of the invention will be apparent to one with skill in the art upon examination of the following figures and detailed description. It is intended that all such additional embodiments, features, and

advantages be included within this description, be within the scope of the invention, and be protected by the accompanying claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

The components in the figures are not necessarily to scale, emphasis instead being placed upon illustrating the principles of the invention. In the figures, like reference numerals designate corresponding parts throughout the different views.

FIG. 1 depicts an ad-book preparation system in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 2 illustrates an example user terminal of FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 illustrates an example ad-book server of FIG. 1.

FIG. 4 depicts a flow chart for creating ad-books.

FIG. 5 depicts an example advertisement selection screen.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIG. 1 depicts a block diagram of an advertisement book (used herein as “ad-book”) preparation system under an embodiment of the invention. Under the embodiment, an advertiser may use a user terminal 2, 4 to prepare an advertisement to be placed in an ad-book. An ad-book server 6 receives advertisement data from a user terminal 2, 4 via a communications network 10. In an illustrative embodiment, communications network 10 functions to carry information between the user terminals 2, 4 and the ad-book server 6 to facilitate the creation of ad-books. The communications network 10 may include circuit switched telephony as used in public switch telephone networks (PSTN) or data packet networks adhering to Internet Protocol (IP), frame relay, or Asynchronous Transfer Mode (ATM) protocols. In an illustrative embodiment, communications network 10 provides IP communication for user terminal 2, 4 and ad-book server 6.

As used herein, an advertiser includes members and supporters of an organization, e.g. charity, school, team, association, club, professional organization, lodge, union, board, fraternity, sisterhood, cause, hospital, home, condo-board, synagogue, event, community group, political party candidate, and volunteers and staff of the organization. For example, a local hardware store may be an advertiser since it may desire to support the local community group. Further, the advertiser may include

representatives and agents of the members and supporters. For example, a marketing manager or a secretary for the marketing manager may be termed an "advertiser" for purposes of this application. Further yet, volunteers or members of the organization may serve as advertisers. For example, a local bakery may desire that the volunteers of the synagogue put together the advertisement on the bakery's behalf.

The user terminal 2, 4 functions to provide an interactive input apparatus for the creation of advertisements to be placed in ad-books. As used herein, the term "advertisement" includes announcements, statements, proclamations, public statements, posters, billboards, public notices, classified ads, want ads, commercials, flyers, brochures, and other information to be disseminated to the public. The advertisement may include graphics, simple text, images, video clips, audio clips, and audiovisual information.

An embodiment of the present invention may be employed and used in conjunction with any computer system, such as a personal computer, a notebook computer, a personal digital assistant (PDA), a cellular telephone, or a mobile/wireless assistant or automatic teller machine (ATM) or automatic ticket dispenser. For example, as shown in FIG. 2, a user terminal 2, 4 may be a personal computer system including a monitor 12, a keyboard 14, a mouse 16, random access memory (RAM), storage in the form of a hard disk, a scanner 18, and network access 20 to the communications network 10. The personal computer may also include a floppy disk, a CD-ROM drive, read-only-memory, a modem, speakers, a camera, and a laser printer 22 as are well known in the art. In addition to a personal computer, the user terminal 2, 4 may be practiced using a network computer, a "dumb terminal" on a multi-user system, or an Internet or intranet computer, in which software is resident on the Internet or intranet, rather than stored on a hard disk on a personal computer. Further, the user terminal 2, 4 may either operate in a stand-alone mode or over a network.

The user terminal 2, 4 may be provisioned with computer operating software currently available on a number of platforms, such as Microsoft Windows, Apple MacOS and Sun Solaris. The computer system may be running Windows 98, Windows NT, or equivalent, Palm OS, WindowsCE, or equivalent or an operating system used on Apple or Sun Computers. An embodiment of the present invention is not limited to a particular operating system or computer system to function.

The user terminal 2, 4 allows an advertiser to prepare an advertisement by using the computer (as shown in FIG. 2) to display and edit a desired advertisement. A desired advertisement 44 is shown in FIG. 1 as it would be displayed on the monitor 12 of the user terminal 2. The user terminal 2, 4 may be provisioned with computer software currently available for the preparation of the advertisement or simple content. Computer software, such as Microsoft Office, Corel PageMaker and Adobe PhotoShop may be suitable for the preparation of a desired advertisement. Further, the user terminal 2, 4 may be used to connect with the ad-book server 6 to transmit the desired advertisement to the ad-book server 6 to be printed on a printer or to be formatted for display as an electronic ad-book.

The ad-book server 6 functions to perform processing for the creation of ad-books. It may provide user terminals 2, 4 with the ability to enter prepared content or advertisements or to prepare an advertisement for an ad-book. An embodiment of the ad-book server 6 may be employed and used in conjunction with any computer system, such as a personal desktop computer. For example, as shown in FIG. 3, an ad-book server 6 includes a web server system may include a monitor 26, a keyboard 30, a mouse 28, a processing unit 24, and network access 35 with a firewall 34 to the communications network 10. The web server may also include a floppy disk, a CD-ROM drive, read-only-memory, a modem, speakers, a camera, a zip drive and a laser printer 32 as are well known in the art. Optionally, the ad-book server may include a database for managing ad-books, user terminals 2, 4, advertisers, and advertisements.

The ad-book server 6 may be provisioned with computer operating software currently available on a number of platforms, such as Microsoft Windows, Apple MacOS and Sun Solaris. The computer system may be running Windows 98, Windows NT, or equivalent, Palm OS, WindowsCE, or equivalent or an operating system used on Apple or Sun Computers. In an illustrative embodiment of the present invention, the ad-book server 6 may be programmed as a web server adhering to the Active Server Pages specification to generate web pages for display on the user terminals 2, 4. An embodiment of the present invention is not limited to a particular operating system or computer system to function.

In operation, an embodiment of the present invention functions to allow advertisers at user terminals 2, 4 to produce advertisements for ad-books. FIG. 4 is a

flowchart illustrating an example flow of the functions performed by the ad-book server 6 in creating ad-books. Advertisers at user terminals 2, 4 may connect to the ad-book server 6 by accessing the Internet via the communications network 10 and entering a URL address relating to the ad-book server 6. An advertiser at a user terminal 2, 4 may register (see Block 36) with the ad-book server by entering information related to the ad-book, the organization, and the advertiser. For example, the advertiser may enter the business name, address, and telephone number. The advertiser at a user terminal 2, 4 may prepare an advertisement (see Block 38) by a number of different methods including by downloading an advertisement that has been previously prepared, filling in one of several standard forms, and composing an advertisement at the ad-book server 6 (see block 38). Downloading may include transmitting the previously prepared advertisement or standard form from the user terminal 2, 4 to the ad-book server 6 through the communications network 10. An advertiser may directly create an advertisement using applications software such as Microsoft Word, Corel PageMaker and Adobe PhotoShop. As mentioned, an example advertisement 44 prepared on the user terminal 2 and viewed on the monitor 12 of the user terminal 2 is shown in FIG. 1.

Alternatively, an advertisement may be composed at the ad-book server 6 by selecting choices relating to the advertisement including desired size, cost/fee, message, layout, and background from a web-based advertisement preparation tool. The web-based advertisement preparation tool may be executed at ad-book server 6 and may present choices relating to advertisement size, placement, cost/fee, layout, background and text to the user terminals 2, 4. For example, desired messages available for selection may include "Congratulations!" "Good Luck on the Fundraising," and "We Support You!" Further, messages may be personal or personalized so that the advertiser may input personal information such as a name. For example, personalized messages available for selection include "From Your Friends at _____", or "With Love From _____".

Advertisement preparation (see Block 38) also includes selecting one of a number of desired backgrounds by using an input apparatus, such as mouse 16 on the user terminal 2, 4, to select among multiple background patterns being displayed. Choices may include regular and premium placement. For example, an advertiser may choose the "Gold" background as shown in FIG. 5 at a higher cost to show their higher

degree of support for the organization. Advertisement preparation (see Block 38) may also include selecting font, font size, and color as is known in the art. For example, an advertiser may choose to have white letters in an Ariel font size of 14. Other variations of advertisement preparation are known in the publishing art and will not be further described herein.

Further, it may be possible to select an advertisement theme so that the number of choices that an advertiser has to make in order to compose an advertisement is reduced. For example, a predefined advertisement theme such as "Formal," "Sponsor," "Endower," or "President's Level" may define a message, layout, background and lettering. Further, the cost associated with predefined advertisement themes may commensurate with various levels of giving. Further, an advertiser may input multimedia comprising graphics, images, video clips, audio clips and audiovisual to the advertisement. For example, a photograph input by use of a camera (not illustrated in FIG. 2) may be used as part of the advertisement. If an advertiser wishes to use a previously designed advertisement, or revise a past ad, then the advertiser may select a prepared advertisement from a list of prepared advertisements or from an archive of past ads which may be stored at the ad-book server 6. The ad-book server 6 may maintain archives classified according to a criterion, e.g. advertiser name. Once the advertisement has been prepared, it may be displayed to the advertiser so that further changes or editing may be made. Shown in FIG. 1 is an example advertisement 46 prepared by selecting choices from the ad-book server 6 and shown on the monitor of the user terminal 4.

The ad-book server 6 may also generate messages to the user terminal 4. Messages that may be generated include suggesting modifications to an ad, reminding an advertiser to renew, informing the advertiser of potential ad-books to advertise in, and promoting an advertiser to re-run an ad. The ad-book server 6 may use up-selling sales techniques and user demographic information to suggest specialty ad placement. For example, the server 6 may maintain a database of user demographic information and ad-book characteristics that may be analyzed to form recommendations regarding potential advertiser interest. For example, the server 6 may suggest that an advertiser place an ad on a particular date in an ad-book calendar or the server 6 may suggest that an advertiser place an ad alongside specific members.

Data processing occurs once advertisement preparation has been completed (see block 40). Since many advertisements and many ad-books may be processed at the ad-book server 6, data processing includes classifying each advertisement received into individual ad-books (or multiple ad-books if so desired). For example, Bob's Garage may prepare and transfer an advertisement showing its support for the local girls' softball team to the ad-book server 6. The ad-book server 6 may classify the advertisement for inclusion in the softball team ad-book. Yet another example, a Chicago-area fast food restaurant may support several causes and wish to be included in many different ad-books. Ad-book server 6 may classify the fast food restaurant advertisement for a homeless society ad-book, a legal clinic ad-book and a church affiliated ad-book.

An embodiment of this invention allows one advertiser to support many organizations. For example, a regional or national advertiser wishing to support all organizations that meet the advertiser's demographic, advertising or sponsorship criteria may designate support by selecting all relevant ad-books. In a more specific example, a major cosmetic company may wish to support women's organizations, including girl's sports teams, women's health clubs, and women's charities within its major markets. In yet another example, a major sporting goods supplier may wish to sponsor all youth sport teams. Being able to support many organizations is a benefit of an embodiment of this invention. Pooling organizations together provides efficiency in securing advertisements from an advertiser. Further, pooling allows one advertiser to efficiently support many organizations. Thus, both advertisers and organizations benefit from using an embodiment of this invention.

In an alternate embodiment, data processing (see Block 40) includes the step of processing a mode of payment for placing the advertisement in an ad-book. For example, an advertiser may enter an advertiser's credit card number and request that the bill be charged to the credit card. The mode of payment may also include direct bank drafts or a request to be billed. Ad-book server 6 may process the payment information and send a follow up receipt for payment. Further, the ad-book server 6 may consolidate payment and advertisement information for the advertiser. In such a manner, an embodiment of this invention provides assistance with specialized tax issues which many not-for-profit organizations face.

communications network 10. In one embodiment, user terminals 2, 4 may view an electronic ad-book that has HTML versions of the advertisements.

An embodiment of the present invention may be provided as software, which may be loaded from floppy disks, from a CD-ROM, over a network, or from any other suitable storage media. The software may be loaded onto the hard disk drive of a computer in a manner that is known to those skilled in the art.

While various embodiments of the invention have been described, it will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art that many more embodiments and implementations are possible that are within the scope of this invention.